



## Give Me Authority or Give Me Death

Our study of the Ten Commandments is a study of God's law-order. He intends for the world to operate according to *His* rules. And the existence of these rules implies an existence of not only the Ruler, but also the presence of *rulers*. Such authorities are parents, employers, government officials, police officers, headmasters and pastors. If there will be order in society then both rules *and* rulers must be obeyed and respected. We deduce this generally from the first four commandments and particularly from the fifth commandment.

When the Lord commands for us to '*honour father and mother*,' He is implying a *synecdoche*, where the part represents the rest who are in the same class; that is, 'the part represents the whole.' For example, 'He showed his faced in class' should not be interpreted as a bodiless student (some teachers may dispute this!); Likewise the fifth commandment obliges us to honour *all* those who are in positions of authority over us.

'Authority' is not a very popular concept in our day; in fact I doubt that it has ever been. We don't like to be told what to do. Recently while I was having my teeth cleaned the hygienist said to me, as she was giving me instructions, "I am sorry if I sound like I am telling you what to do," to which I replied, "Don't worry about it, I'm a pastor and that is how I spend a lot of my time!" Clearly I would have been foolish to dispute her instructions. The fact is, she knows a lot more about teeth and dental hygiene than I do. The health of my teeth and thus the freedom to continue to use them (for many more decades, I trust) is dependent upon my 'following orders.' Well, when it comes to God's Law, the same principle holds, howbeit here it is of manifold greater importance than plaque and gums.

The Lord knows that our freedom to enjoy the life that He gives to us is dependent upon our obeying, following *His* orders. The Lord Jesus Christ mandated that those who embrace the gospel be taught to '*observe all that He commands*' (Matthew 28:19, 20). This 'Great Commission' is rooted in authority (v. 18 '*I have all authority...*') and it therefore expects all who call themselves disciples to *submit* to His authority. To refuse to do so is tantamount to denying that one has been delivered from the bondage of sin and is to confess that they are still so enslaved. Yes, the New Testament, as well as the Old Testament expects for God's people to respectfully submit to authority.

As I am sure that we can all lament, such submission does not come easily. Like Eve, we still hear the 'hiss of the serpent' as he tells us that freedom is found in autonomy; liberty is found in our 'doing our own thing.' Intellectually we know that this is a lie and yet the temptation persists. We will struggle with this until we are glorified and so in the mean time we need to remember the principle that God's law (His commandments, statutes, judgments – His Word) is given to us for our benefit, even when we feel that it constricts us. We therefore need to grow in our love for His authority. Our prayer needs to be "Give me authority thereby giving me life!"

One aid in this is to read, frequently, Psalm 119. This Psalm contains 176 verses with each one making some reference to God's Word. It was written by one (anonymous, though I suspect it was David) who loved God's authority. Only when we can say 'How love I thy law, it is my meditation all the day' (Ps 119:97) will we truly experience the liberty that we have in Christ; for such freedom is inseparable from living in submission to Christ's 'law-order.'

In a recent children's talk I spoke of how a goldfish is much safer inside the fish tank rather than outside. Though he may look through the glass and desire 'freedom' from such restraints, such

ideas are an illusion. The life of the goldfish is dependent on its God-ordained environment. Any tampering with that and, quite literally, its life goes down the toilet. (Sidebar: I now own two goldfish and they seem very healthy and happy!)

But so it is with you and I. The revolutionary cry, 'give me liberty or give me death' may be true when it comes to unjust taxation, but it is a *delusion* when it comes to our relationships, both with one another and with God. The individual who is constantly chafing against God's law-order will find their life being 'flushed into futility' rather than fulfilled with 'freedom.' Those who pursue liberty apart from God's law-order are crying out for death.

Let's get practical about this. Children, your freedom to enjoy life as God intends will never be found outside respectful submission to your parents. Employee, your liberty to develop your vocation will never be expanded by disrespecting your boss. Church member, your Christian discipleship will not progress if you are constantly criticising and disrespecting the eldership. And further, if you constantly criticize God's Word rather submitting to its criticism of you, then you can forget having any semblance of Christ's offer of abundance of life.

One final application to parents. It is your responsibility under God to teach your children the principle of 'give me authority or give me death.' As it has been well said, many things are 'better caught than taught.' That is, you must lead by example. If you want your children to show biblical respect to their authorities, then make sure that you show them how. Be cautious of how you speak of *your* God given authorities. If you backbite and rebel, then don't be surprised when little Johnnie rolls his eyes at your commands, inviting the judgment of God (See Proverbs 30:17).

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